

Testimony of Margie B. Gillis, President, Literacy How, Inc. and
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Regarding Proposed Bill 6501, *An Act Concerning Delays in the Evaluation and
Determination Process For Students Suspected of Requiring Special Education Services*
March 7, 2011

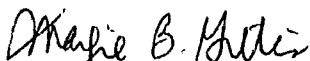
Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann and Members of the Committee, I present this testimony in support of Raised Bill No. 6501, *An Act Concerning Delays in the Evaluation and Determination Process For Students Suspected of Requiring Special Education Services*. In supporting this bill, I would like to request that it specifically state that the SRBI process NOT delay a comprehensive evaluation or special education eligibility determination.

Over the past several years I served on two task forces where the members debated these very issues with strong opinions and deep-seated emotions. The first was the task force that developed the state's guidelines for Response to Intervention, otherwise referred to as SRBI – Scientific Research-based Interventions. The other was the task force that revised the LD Guidelines for the state. The two task forces had several members in common and, of course, solid representation from the State Department of Education. There is strong overlap between these two documents and ideally, they should support, strengthen, and substantiate each other. However, as those of us who have been around can testify, the devil is in the details and the details are unfortunately, subject to interpretation and great disparity in terms of how the recommendations are implemented.

As a former special education teacher, I want to speak on behalf of those students identified with learning disabilities who aren't in a position to advocate for themselves. These students, the majority of whom have reading disabilities, are oftentimes missed or mistaught. Our state is one of many that does not use the term dyslexia to refer to students with reading disabilities, and as a result, many of these students also suffer from what I refer to as 'dysteachia.' I'm not blaming the teachers who often 'don't know what they don't know.' In so many cases, their hands are tied. First, most have not received training in evidence-based reading instruction. And second, they are told by their administrators not to refer students whom they have concerns about for special education. One colleague who is a special education teacher in a large CT urban district recently emailed me saying: "SRBI is *not* being implemented with fidelity--or anything approaching fidelity-- by regular education personnel in many places. That's something that absolutely figures into the prevention of both under- and over-identification of learning disabilities; the lack of this implementation also throws the entire burden on the overwhelmed special education umbrella--particularly the resource teachers and the school psychologists in high-risk urban areas (with their army of well-meaning, hard-working, and absolutely under-trained-in-reading professionals)."

Response-to-Intervention, the very process that was meant to ensure that prevention and early intervention were the rule for our most vulnerable children, is now the mechanism that is preventing these children from receiving targeted interventions to meet their instructional needs. The State Department of Education (SDE) then has three extremely important jobs to do: First, they must ensure that our prospective special education teachers be required to take and pass the CT Foundations of Reading Test, a test that is required for PreK – 6th grade general education licensure. Second, SDE must hold districts accountable for delivering high-quality professional development in evidence-based reading instruction. Third, with strong policy and laws already in place, SDE must enforce these policies and hold districts and schools accountable for upholding the federal and state laws that mandate quality instruction for children identified with LD.

Respectfully submitted,



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